

## Sermon Outline.

### CHRIST AND THE POOR: AND THE CHURCH AND THE POOR.

MT. 11: 2-6, LK. 7; 18-23.

Sermon No. 1

#### INTRODUCTION.

#### .1 The circumstances.

(1) John had been arrested.

(a) For his faithfulness in reproofing "wickedness in high places"—for reproofing Herod for marrying his brother's wife contrary to law. Mt. 14: 3-5.

(b) Because his great popularity among the common people lead Herod to fear that John might head a rebellion against him—*Josephus*.

(c) And, probably, because he was urged on by the Pharisees.—*Edersheim*. These three motives, or any others that may have influenced Herod, culminated in the one recorded by Matthew.

(2.) He has been now for about ten months, lodged in a dingy, sultry prison connected with Herod's palace at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea.

#### I. John's message to Christ.

(1) After having spent years in the natural and untrammelled life of the wilderness; and eighteen months in the active work of his ministry and that among the multitudes, this enforced idleness preyed upon his mind. Deprived of fresh air, and an opportunity to do good, is it any wonder that John was in doubt and perplexity?

(2) Through his disciples he had some intercourse with the outside world. He had heard of the growing popularity of Jesus; and of his many and wonderful works: and these very reports added to his confusion. Am I wrong after all? Is he really the Messiah as I once testified, and as his works still indicate? But if so why am I, his forerunner, allowed to remain in this plight? Why does he delay so long? Why don't he take the kingdom as we had hoped, and deliver our nation from the Romans and me from this prison? John still believed in Jesus and this very belief made his difficulties all the greater. He believes him to be the "coming one" but still he is not carrying out the program laid out for him by the popular theology of the time. Are our

ideas all wrong, or must we look for another? Anyway John still has such confidence in Jesus that he will first submit his doubts to him in the hope of some rational and satisfactory answer.

#### II. Christ's Answer.

(1) Note that Christ did not answer John by a philosophical argument. He did not send him a well reasoned-out theory to show how that all this was to be expected in a rational and moral universe into which sin has come.

(2) Neither did he send him a well constructed theological argument. He did not quote book and verse showing how that according to the Law and the Prophets things are slowly but surely working toward the desired goal. Doubtless he could have done this; but it was not his method.

(3) His answer was in deeds; his method was historical. Go tell John what ye have seen and heard. Don't give him an argument or a proof text; but give him the facts, and let him draw his own conclusions. Tell him what I am doing.

(a) Tell him that I am not a mere talker, preaching a panacea for all human ills, but that I am actively engaged in curing these ills—that the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.

(b) Tell him that the poor—that class so neglected by the Roman State, by the Greek School and by the Jewish church have the Gospel preached to them.

(4) Christ was willing to stake all upon what he was doing. If I have a divine commission I will do divine deeds. If I am the Son of God I will love all of his children with a love that can be seen and known. Christ's argument was written in deeds of self-denying love—in deeds of helpfulness. The Roman, the Greek and the Jew were looking after those that could help them: neither of them had any use for the poor. Christ was looking after those that needed help and from whom he could not get help. Their motive was selfish, his unselfish. If his works were such as all could see were to advance his own interests how could he prove that he differed

from others? But if his works proved him to have motives differing from others, who will deny his sonship and his commission?

#### III. The Church Tested.

(1). What was true of Christ then is true of the church now. The old theological and philosophical arguments cannot prove her claims. Her character and her mission must be sustained as Christ's were. However useful other arguments may have been in other times, the only final argument for our times written in deeds of love. We care nothing now for Baptismal or Apostolic succession. If any church or institution now claims to be Christian or Apostolic, the only way it can get others to accept that claim is by Christ-like and Apostolic deeds. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," Mt. vii: 16.

If an institution neglects any of God's children can it claim to be divine? And if it neglects any class for whom Christ labored and died can it claim to be Christian?

(2) The argument for "Apostolic Succession" or for a "Scriptural Church Polity" can be of little use when one is in need. What cares the poor drowning man whether the rope that is thrown out to him is made of cotton or hemp, or whether it was twisted by hand or by machinery only so it brings him to shore? What cares the poor dying sinner whether it is a Congregational, Presbyterian or Episcopal polity that brings Christ to him. It is help he wants. These things cannot render the help he wants. Only Christ can I. What he wants now and what he need is not a doctrine or a polity but a Savior. When he is brought in touch with this Savior and is safe other things will take their proper place.

(3) The argument for "Baptismal Succession" or for "Scriptural Ordinances Scripturally Administered," when man is awakened to the consciousness of his peril, and cries out "what shall I do to be saved?" sounds like mockery. In this condition of mind what cares he whether there are two or seven or no sacraments? He is condemned to death for his sins. He feels death stealing its approaches upon him. He wants life. He must come in touch